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Bugging Discounted as Factor in Canal Treaties

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The Senate Intelligence Committee, after probing charges of wiretapping and blackmail in the Panama Canal negotiations, said yesterday it had found no evidence that the talks were influenced "in any way" by U.S. intelligence activities.

That conclusion was announced by the committee chairman, Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii), after the panel heard lengthy, secret testimony from Central Intelligence Agency Director Stansfield Turner, and the two U.S. treaty negotiators, Ellsworth Bunker and Sol M. Linowitz.

Inouye refused to discuss any details of the allegation that the committee began investigating last week. However, Senate sources said it involved a 1974 incident in which U.S. agents in Panama bugged the home and office of that country's military ruler, Gen. Omar Torrijos.

According to the sources, the com-

mittee was inquiring into a charge that Torrijos learned of the surveillance, after an unidentified U.S. soldier gave him copies of the intercepted telephone conversations, and then used the information to blackmail the United States into making concessions.

In their secret testimony, the sources added, U.S. officials confirmed that electronic surveillance of Torrijos had been instituted after then-Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger and Panama's foreign minister, Juan Tack, reached a 1974 agreement to resume the canal negotiations.

But, the sources said, the officials also denied to the committee that the Panamanians used their knowledge of the incident to blackmail the United States. Instead, they reportedly insisted that the matter was dropped by both sides and played no role in negotiating the treaties signed by Torrijos and President Carter on Sept. 7.

When reporters asked Inouye what

had been discussed in the committee meeting, he replied, "no comment" and noted that federal law prohibits "public discussion of signal-type intelligence" that has not been declassified. He said the committee does not intend to seek declassification of documents or testimony related to the allegation.

Several reporters then pointed out that the treaties are the subject of intense controversy and asked if Inouye expected the committee's statement to foreclose further discussion of the incident in the impending debate over Senate approval of the canal agreements.

He replied, "I would hope the people of the United States would have some faith" in the committee's findings. They had been reached, he said, after hearing the testimony of Turner, Linowitz and Bunker, officials of the State Department and the intelligence community, and a review of "thousands of documents."